

# Trails West

## MAIN IDEA

Thousands of settlers followed trails through the West to gain land and a chance to make a fortune.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

This migration brought Americans to the territories that became New Mexico, Oregon, and Utah;

## TERMS & NAMES

Jedediah Smith	Santa Fe Trail
mountain man	Oregon Trail
Jim Beckwourth	Mormon
land speculator	Brigham Young

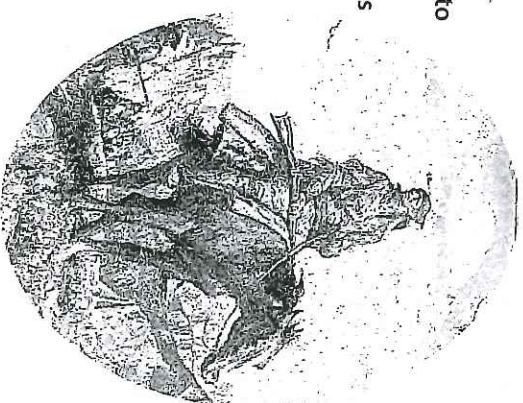
## ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

The mountain man **Jedediah Smith** was leading an expedition to find a route through the Rocky Mountains when a grizzly bear attacked. The bear seized Smith's head in its mouth, shredded his face, and partially tore off one ear. Smith's men chased the bear away. **Jim Clyman** recalled the scene.

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

I asked [Smith] what was best. He said, "One or two go for water and if you have a needle and thread get it out and sew up my wounds around my head." . . . I told him I could do nothing for his ear. "Oh, you must try to stitch it up some way or other," said he. Then I put in my needle and stitched it through and through.

**Jim Clyman**, quoted in *The West*, by Geoffrey C. Ward



Jedediah Smith

Ten days after this attack, Jedediah Smith was ready to continue exploring. Smith was one of the daring fur trappers and explorers known as **mountain men**. The mountain men opened up the West by discovering the best trails through the Rockies. In this section, you will learn about the trails—and why pioneers followed them west.

## Mountain Men and the Rendezvous

Mountain men spent most of the year alone, trapping small animals such as beavers. Easterners wanted beaver furs to make the men's hats that were in fashion at the time. To obtain furs, mountain men roamed the Great Plains and the Far West, the regions between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean, and set traps in icy mountain streams.

Because of their adventures, mountain men such as Jedediah Smith and **Jim Beckwourth** became famous as rugged loners. However, they were not as independent as the legends have portrayed them. Instead, they were connected economically to the businessmen who bought their furs.



### Taking Notes

Use your chart to take notes about New Mexico, Oregon, and Utah.

	Types of people who traveled there
New Mexico	
Utah	
Oregon	
Texas	
California	



[illegible]

1798-1867

Jim Beckwourth was born in slavery and set free by his owner. At the age of 25, Beckwourth joined a group of fur traders going west and in time became a daring mountain man.

For several years, Beckwourth lived with a Crow tribe. Later, he worked as an army scout and gold prospector. In 1850, he discovered a mountain pass that became the route into present-day northern California. This pass is still called Beckwourth Pass.

**What was Beckwourth's most important contribution to the westward movement?**

# The Future of the West

Few of the people who went west shared Smith's noble motive. To many, the West with its vast stretches of land offered a golden chance to make money. The Louisiana Purchase had doubled the size of the United States, and some Americans wanted to take the land away from Native

Americans who inhabited this territory.

People called land speculators bought huge areas of land. To speculate means to buy something in the hope that it will increase in value. If land value did go up, speculators divided their land holdings into smaller sections. They made great profits by selling those sections to the thousands of settlers who dreamed of owning their own farms.

Manufacturers and merchants soon followed the settlers west. They hoped to earn money by making and selling items that farmers needed. Other people made the trip to find jobs or to escape people to whom they owed money.

One businessman, William Henry Ashley, created a trading arrangement called the rendezvous system. Under this system, individual trappers came to a pre-arranged site for a rendezvous with traders from the east. The trappers bought supplies from those traders and paid them in furs. The rendezvous took place every summer from 1825 to 1840. In that year, silk hats replaced beaver hats as the fashion, and the fur trade died out.

# Mountain Men Open the West

During the height of the fur trade, mountain men worked some streams so heavily that they killed off the animals. This forced the trappers to search for new streams where beaver lived. The mountain men's explorations provided Americans with some of the earliest firsthand knowledge of the Far West. This knowledge, and the trails the mountain men blazed, made it possible for later pioneers to move west.

For example, thousands of pioneers used South Pass, the wide valley through the Rockies that Jedediah Smith had publicized. Smith learned of this pass, in present-day Wyoming, from Native Americans. Unlike the high northern passes used by Lewis and Clark, South Pass was low, so snow did not block it as often as it blocked higher passes. Also, because South Pass was wide and less steep, wagon trails could run through it.

Smith wrote to his brother that he wanted to help people in need: "It is for this that I go for days without eating, and am pretty well satisfied if I can gather a few roots, a few snails, . . . a piece of horseflesh, or a fine roasted dog."

**rendezvous**  
(RAHN•day•voo):  
meeting; from  
a French word  
meaning "present  
yourselves"

**Reading History**  
Class of 1994

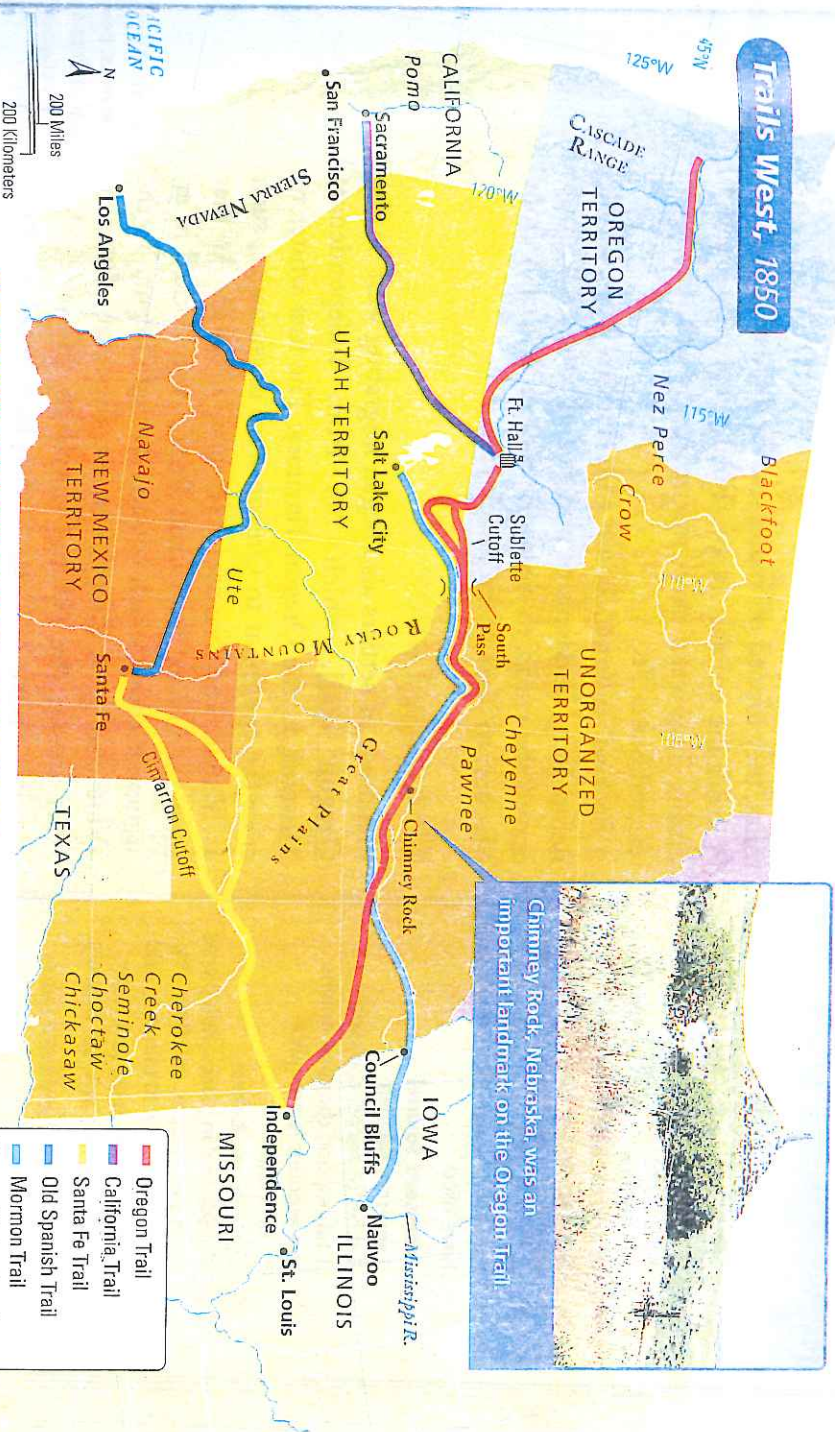
**A. Reading a Map Find South**  
Pass on the map on page 395.  
Notice which two trails used that pass.

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## Trails West, 1850



### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Maps

1. Place What is the length in miles of the Oregon Trail from Independence, Missouri, to Fort Vancouver?
2. Human-Environment Interaction Why do you think some of the trails ran along rivers?

## The Trail to Santa Fe

Traders also traveled west in search of markets. After Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, it opened its borders to American traders, whom Spain had kept out. In response, the Missouri trader William Becknell set out with hardware, cloth, and china for Santa Fe, capital of the Mexican province of New Mexico. By doing so, he opened the **Santa Fe Trail**, which led from Missouri to Santa Fe. Once in Santa Fe, he made a large profit because the New Mexicans were eager for new merchandise.

When Becknell returned to Missouri weeks later, a curious crowd met him. One man picked up one of Becknell's bags and slit it open with a knife. As gold and silver coins spilled onto the street, the onlookers gasped. The news spread that New Mexico was a place where traders could become rich.

The following spring, Becknell headed to Santa Fe again. This time he loaded his trade goods into covered wagons, which Westerners called prairie schooners. Their billowing white canvas tops made them look like schooners, or sailing ships.

Becknell could not haul wagons over the mountain pass he had used on his first trip to Santa Fe. Instead, he found a cutoff, a shortcut that avoided steep slopes but passed through a deadly desert to the south. As his traders crossed the burning sands, they ran out of water. Crazed by

**Reading History**  
B. Making  
Inferences What  
do you think  
other Missourians  
might decide to  
do after seeing  
Becknell's  
wealth?

**Reading History**  
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DINNER ON THE TRAIL

To add to their limited supplies, pioneers on the trail gathered berries and wild onions. They also hunted buffalo and small game. Below is a recipe that many might have used.

**Fricassee Squirrel**

- 1 squirrel, skinned
  - 3 slices of bacon, chopped
  - 1 tablespoon chopped onions
  - 2 teaspoons lemon juice
  - ½ cup water
  - salt, pepper, & flour
- Cut squirrel in pieces. Rub pieces with salt, pepper, and flour. Fry with bacon for 30 minutes. Add onion, lemon juice, and water. Cover tightly. Cook for 1½ hours.

*Nebraska Centennial First Ladies Cookbook*



ing in them so you can cut off a slice whenever you are hungry.”

Such stories tempted many people to make the 2,000-mile journey to Oregon. In 1843, nearly 1,000 people traveled from Missouri to Oregon. The next year, twice as many came. “The Oregon Fever has broken out,” observed a Boston newspaper, “and is now raging.”

## One Family Heads West

The experiences of the Sager family show how difficult the trail could be. In 1844, Henry Sager, his wife, and six children left Missouri to find cheap, fertile land in Oregon. They had already moved four times in the past four years. Henry’s daughter Catherine explained her family’s moves.

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Father was one of those restless men who are not content to remain in one place long at a time. . . . [He] had been talking of going to Texas. But mother, hearing much said about the healthfulness of Oregon, preferred to go there.

Catherine Sager, quoted in *The West*, by Geoffrey C. Ward

The Oregon Trail was dangerous, so pioneers joined wagon trains. They knew their survival would depend on cooperation. Before setting out, the wagon train members agreed on rules and elected leaders to enforce them.

Even so, life on the trail was full of hardship. The Sagers had barely begun the trip when Mrs. Sager gave birth to her seventh child. Two

thirst, they lopped off mules’ ears and killed their dogs to drink the animals’ blood. Finally, the men found a stream. The water saved them from death, and they reached Santa Fe.

Becknell returned home with another huge profit. Before long, hundreds of traders and prairie schooners braved the cutoff to make the 800-mile journey from Missouri to New Mexico each year.

## Oregon Fever

Hundreds of settlers also began migrating west on the **Oregon Trail**, which ran from Independence, Missouri, to the Oregon Territory. The first whites to cross the continent to Oregon were missionaries, such as Marcus and Narcissa Whitman in 1836. At that time, the United States and Britain were locked in an argument about which country owned Oregon. To the Whitmans’ great disappointment, they made few converts among the Native Americans. However, their glowing reports of Oregon’s rich land began to attract other American settlers.

Amazing stories spread about Oregon. The sun always shone there. Wheat grew as tall as a man. One tale claimed that pigs were “running about, . . . round and fat, and already cooked, with knives and forks sticking in them so you can cut off a slice whenever you are hungry.”

**Vocabulary**  
**converts:** people who accept a new religious belief



*enrichment*  
**Finding Main**  
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 igers face?

months later, nine-year-old Catherine fell under a moving wagon, which crushed her left leg. Later, “camp fever” killed both of the Sager parents. Even though the Sager parents had died, the other families in the train cooperated to help the Sager orphans make it to Oregon. There, the Whitmans agreed to adopt them. When Narcissa met them, Catherine recalled, “We thought as we shyly looked at her that she was the prettiest woman we had ever seen.”

## The Mormon Trail

While most pioneers went west in search of wealth, one group migrated for religious reasons. The Mormons, who settled Utah, were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Joseph Smith had founded this church in upstate New York in 1830. The Mormons lived in close communities, worked hard, shared their goods, and prospered.

The Mormons, though, also made enemies. Some people reacted angrily to the Mormons’ teachings. They saw the Mormon practice of polygamy—allowing a man to have more than one wife at a time—as immoral. Others objected to their holding property in common.

In 1844, an anti-Mormon mob in Illinois killed Smith. Brigham Young, the next Mormon leader, moved his people out of the United States. His destination was Utah, then part of Mexico. In this desolate region, he hoped his people would be left to follow their faith in peace.

In 1847, about 1,600 Mormons followed part of the Oregon Trail to Utah. There they built a new settlement by the Great Salt Lake. Because Utah has little rainfall, the Mormons had to work together to build dams and canals. These structures captured water in the hills and carried it to the farms in the valleys below. Through teamwork, they made their desert homeland bloom.

In the meantime, changes were taking place in Texas. As you will read in Section 2, Americans had been moving into that Mexican territory, too.

**Vocabulary**  
**converts:** people  
**who accept a**  
**new religious**  
**belief**  
**D. Analyzing**  
**Causes** Why did  
**Brigham Young**  
**lead the Mormons**  
**to Utah?**

## Section 1

### Assessment

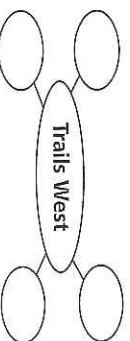
#### 1. **Terms & Names**

**Explain the significance of:**

- Jedediah Smith
- mountain man
- Jim Beckwourth
- land speculator
- Santa Fe Trail
- Oregon Trail
- Mormon
- Brigham Young

#### 2. **Using Graphics**

Use a cluster diagram like the one shown to review details about the trails west.



#### 3. **Main Ideas**

a. How did the mountain men open up the West for later settlement?

b. What are two examples of pioneer groups who used cooperation to overcome hardship?

c. What economic and social forces drew people to the West?

#### 4. **Critical Thinking**

**Drawing Conclusions** Of all the hardships faced by people who went west, what do you think was the worst? Explain.

- THINK ABOUT**
- the mountain men
  - William Becknell
  - the Sagers
  - the Mormons

## ACTIVITY OPTIONS

### LANGUAGE ARTS

Research a pioneer from this section and either write a **letter** from his or her point of view to a friend or illustrate a **journal entry** with sights from your journey.

